Article

Reading Phoebe Gloeckner's A Child's Life and Other Stories at the Time of #MeToo

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Abstract:

In this essay, I analyze the autobiographical subject's sexual suffering in Phoebe Gloeckner's graphic memoir, *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (2000), through an investigation of the cartoonist's intertextual reference to Marcel Duchamp's installation, *Étant Donnés: 1° la Chute d'Eau, 2° le Gaz d'Eclairage* (1944-66), and the tradition in which it is situated, which spans back to Gustave Gourbet's infamous painting *L'Origine du Monde* (1866). I propose that to complicate the representation of Minnie's sexual objectification, Gloeckner fuses traces related to the negotiation of the female nude body traced in Duchamp's and Courbet's patriarchal, canonical art, and in Carolee Schneeman's and Judy Chicago's second-wave feminist art. I argue that the graphic memoir introduces Gloeckner as an active consumer of past artworks by performing her feminist reading and reinterpretation of them, and thus, it proposes ways of critically consuming gender formations that reach us via art, literature and social media. My aim is to stress the value of *A Child's Life*, particularly at the time of #MeToo, a period when we are surrounded by testimonies of sexual abuse told by girls and women, while simultaneously being bombarded with their sexualizing images reaching us through the media.

Keywords: Phoebe Gloeckner; *A Child's Life*; Lolita; sexual abuse

Introduction:

In this essay, I examine the sexual suffering of Phoebe Gloeckner's underage autobiographical subject in her graphic memoir, *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (2000), through an investigation of her intertextual reference to Marcel Duchamp's installation, *Étant Donnés: 1° la Chute d'Eau, 2° le Gaz d'Eclairage* (1944-66), and the tradition in which it is

situated, which spans back to the nineteenth century and Gustave Gourbet's infamous painting *L'Origine du Monde* (1866).[1] I demonstrate how, through this reference, *A Child's Life* introduces Gloeckner as an artist and an active reader of past artworks that foreground the sexual objectification of the female body. Her representation of sexual violence is nuanced and political because it introduces artistic creation as a feminist, revisionist and reactionary reading that intervenes in and fuses distinct patriarchal, misogynist and feminist artistic traditions to display Minnie's trauma.[2] Identifying Gloeckner's active reading is, I argue, crucially important at the current moment because in the midst of #MeToo, a time when we are surrounded by girls' and women's testimonies of sexual abuse, not only do we read about, but are actually forced to *look at* her disturbing images of gendered sexual violence and its artistic normalization. Simultaneously, in an environment precariously saturated with sexualizing images of adolescent and pre-adolescent girls reaching us through media, advertising and popular culture, Gloeckner's graphic memoir proposes ways to critically consume and interpret such images.

A Child's Life is embedded in the archive of women's counter-cultural autobiographical comics. Its shameful stories of abuse and incest, as well as Gloeckner's connection with the underground scene of the 1970s and Aline Kominsky-Crumb, the initiator of the genre, situate her work within this tradition.[3] As part of this corpus, Gloekner's graphic memoir expresses sexual trauma from the survivor's perspective and through a risky and productive mobilization of the visual in its narrativization (see also Hatfield 2005; Whitlock 2006; Chute 2010; Chaney 2011; El Refaie 2012; Tolmie 2013).[4] The hybrid nature of comics – interlacing the textual and the visual – renders graphic memoirs a "counterlaw, or out-law" genre of autobiography, whose identification enables a deconstruction of "'master' genres" and it is this potential of Gloeckner's book that I examine (Kaplan 1992, 119).

A Child's Life is a collection of semi-autobiographical comics that recreate incidents from Minnie's life, spanning from childhood to adolescence. It is divided in five sections primarily concerning different forms of sexual and gendered violence against girls and women as well as adolescent female sexual curiosity. These stories are depicted for the most part in black-and-white comics, drawn by Gloeckner between 1976, when she was at the initial stages of her career as a cartoonist, and 1998, when the collection was first published (Gloeckner 2000). In addition to Minnie, we come across other young female subjects like Magda, who meets little men abusing their girlfriends, wives or stepdaughters in the woods in a fairy-tale like narrative; Alice, who is humiliated by her female classmates at a Quaker school because her body is more developed than theirs; Mary, a teenager who has drinking problems and an affair with her mother's boyfriend; and Ann, an adolescent who is very curious about sex and loses her virginity to a stranger who thinks she is a prostitute.

The primary focus of this essay is the chapter "Hommage à Duchamp Or: ʻEtant Donnés: le Bain, le Pere, la Main, la Bitte,'" written and drawn by Gloeckner in 1998 and presenting an incident that took place when Minnie was about eight years old (Gloeckner 2000, 27). In this short three-page chapter, Minnie and her younger sister watch their mother's boyfriend, Pascal in a scene of masturbation in the bathroom. The broken glass on the bathroom door allows the two girls visual access to Pascal, who is undressed and sits on the edge of the bathtub, sexually pleasing himself. The uniqueness of this chapter lies in that unlike the rest in *A Child's Life*, it does not display an underage female (often) nude body in the position of the (frequently) violated and vulnerable sexual spectacle, but rather, it portrays the adult father figure in this position. In this essay, I analyse Gloeckner's manipulation of conventionally gendered positions in a voyeuristic context, as they are described in Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and I investigate whether the girl protagonist can escape her status as a sexual spectacle under the adult male gaze through this

reversal of roles.[5] Simultaneously, approaching the book from an intertextual perspective, I examine how it reconfigures the voyeuristic gendered positions borrowed from Duchamp's installation in this obscene, explicit display of the father figure as a sexual spectacle under the gaze of the two girls as well as later in the narrative (see also Burris 2017; Michael "The Other" 2018).

Closely Reading *A Child's Life* I: An Intervention in the Male Artistic Canon

In "Hommage à Duchamp" (fig. 1), the title is followed by Czech and Urdu translations of the subheading, "Or:'Etant Donnés: le Bain, le Pere, la Main, la Bitte,'" and we come across the first indication that Gloeckner is about to repeat and reconfigure elements from Duchamp's installation. Her ambiguous use of the word "hommage" carries a double connotation that cannot be easily reduced to a single interpretation. On the one hand, it could suggest that Gloeckner indeed honours Duchamp, whose controversial piece functions as a source of inspiration for her. On the other, if it refers to the gendered structures existing in *Étant Donnés*, which depicts a seemingly violated, nude female body, then Gloeckner's reference may function ironically and thus critically. Indeed, even though it might have given her the opportunity to unpack and explore its gendered representations, Duchamp's artwork presents a woman who is objectified, silenced and reduced to her genitalia (see d'Harnoncourt and Hopps 1969; Judovitz 1995; Barzilai 1999; Wallis 2005; Parret 2010; Burris 2017). The deliberate ambivalence of Gloeckner's use of "hommage" in relation to Duchamp haunts the reading of this chapter in particular and the graphic memoir as a whole. This ambivalence is the result of her engagement with *Étant Donnés*, which is unsettling as it is important because it places readers in the uncomfortable in-between position of visually consuming the sexualized gendered subjects of *A Child's Life* in parallel to those found in Duchamp's, and to a different extent, in Courbet's *oeuvre*. In Gloeckner's book, nevertheless,

readers get to know these subjects, which are either abusive or abused and exist both within and outside the context of the family.

Fig.1: page 27 from *A Child's Life and Other Stories* by Phoebe Gloeckner, published by Frog Books/North Atlantic Books, copyright © 1998, 2000 by Phoebe Gloeckner. Reprinted by permission of publisher.

In *Étant Donnés*, which is currently (2018) exhibited at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, two peepholes on a wooden door offer spectators visual access to a three-dimensional female nude body with its genitals in full display.[6] Ironically, the most significant part of the installation, the woman, is not mentioned in the title, which only refers to the waterfall and the illuminating glass, rendering her arresting presence invisible in the words that name the piece. The woman's body is situated in an open space near a waterfall lying on dried branches. Her left breast and her raised arm, holding a lit lamp are visible but her face is cut off from view. She therefore becomes coded with excessive "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey [1975] 2009, 436). As her head is visually inaccessible, she is also reduced to a mere identity-less body, and specifically to her genitals, which constitute the most striking aspect of the installation. Dalia Judovitz suggests that *Étant Donnés* places "emphasis on spectatorship as voyeurism, on visual fascination and seduction" (1995, 8). In addition, she explains that "the violence of this work appears to lie […] in the fact that the spectator is put face-to-face with his or her desire to look, to be fascinated, and to consume sexuality as an image. In the context of the museum where everything is on display, however, the display of sexuality takes an ironic turn" (12).

By forcing spectators to face the nude female genitals of an unknown woman, Duchamp's installation also pushes them to recognise their scopophilic drives. Mulvey has explained that "scopophilia" involves "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" and that positions of looking and being-looked-at are gendered ([1975] 2009, 434). *Étant Donnés* turns its spectators of into voyeurs of a female body that is almost dead-like, apart from her raised hand (see also d'Harnoncourt and Hopps 1969). While Judovitz correctly points to Duchamp's ironic negotiation of spectators' voyeuristic drives, which reappears in *A Child's Life*, she does not refer to how *Étant Donnés* reproduces the gendered relations of looking and being looked at, as those are described in Mulvey's

schema; it is the woman, after all, who is the objectified spectacle. Consequently, the status of the installation can be argued to be that of a misogynistic mid-century representation of the female body. Focusing, however, on its exaggeration and tracing its artistic predecessor, allows the formulation of a counter-argument as well, one that introduces *Étant Donnés* as a parodic artwork that critiques an older canonical piece. In its parodic critical aspect, it becomes similar to, as it simultaneously remains very different from Gloeckner's reconfiguration of the installation in *A Child's Life* and "Hommage" since the subject matter of the two pieces is radically distinct.

The nineteenth-century artistic predecessor of Duchamp's mid-century artwork and Gloeckner's turn-of-the-century graphic memoir, is Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, painted in 1866 and exhibited in Musée d'Orsay (Barzilai 1999).[7] It depicts a close-up realist view of a woman's genitals and it was commissioned by the Turkish ambassador in Paris, Khalil Bey, to be held in his palace as a part of his private collection (Nochlin 1986). Male sexual desire, and specifically scopophilic desire, triggered the creation of the painting – the depiction of a vagina, of the woman as less than a person. The exposure of Duchamp's woman in the public domain, both in the artwork itself, and in the space of the art gallery, exposes and mocks the secret voyeuristic consumption of what falls in the domain of heterosexual pornography.[8] If *L'Origine* demonstrates a pornographic dehumanisation of the female person and her reduction to her genitalia in the service of male voyeuristic pleasure, *Étant Donnés* ironically exaggerates this pornographic scene and transports it in a high-artistic institution, thus mockingly deconstructing the boundaries existing between high art and pornography. Its function can thus be interpreted as ambivalently located in-between the misogynistic and the subversive.[9]

Lynda Nead explains that representations of the female nude "created by male artists not only testify to patriarchal understandings of female sexuality and femininity, they also

endorse certain definitions of male sexuality and masculinity" (1992, 283). Courbet's painting and Duchamp's installation display masculine and feminine sexualities in ways that reproduce heteronormative gender hierarchies. They introduce the former as active and penetrating and the latter as passive and objectified. Despite being a parodic exaggeration, therefore, it is in Courbet's tradition that Duchamp's installation is situated. As Shuli Barzilai suggests, *Étant Donnés,* as a display of *L'Origine*, "simultaneously participates in a pattern of misogyny in which art cannot easily be differentiated from fetishism, pornography, or the profanation of the female body, and stands outside or beyond that pattern" (1999, 18).

While Courbet and Duchamp's works perform a *seeing* and therefore a (re)production of the female body as an objectified sexual spectacle, I consider the extent to which these patriarchal, misogynist gender formations, that span back to the nineteenth century, can be altered through various revisions, like the one offered by Gloeckner in *A Child's Life*.[10] In so doing, I shift attention from the artworks themselves to readers' interpretations, perceiving meaning formation not as static, but as a fluid, subjective, and therefore protean process.[11] *A Child's Life* presents Gloeckner both as an artist and as a consumer of art. In this essay, I propose that paying attention to how she consumes and reconfigures Duchamp's installation foregrounds the political impact of alternative readings of canonical texts like *Étant Donnés* and an understanding of Minnie's sexualisation within the context of a broader normalization of female objectification.

The title page of "Hommage," (fig. 1), depicts Minnie talking with her sister and looking at the bathroom door, noting that "the glass has been knocked out" and that they "can see into the bathroom" (Gloeckner 2000, 27). Readers are presented with a close-up image of the two girls and look from their perspective at the background of the panel, where a door made of a large wooden frame and stained glass can be seen. A part of the glass surface is broken triggering readers' and the two girls' voyeuristic curiosity since it allows visual access into

bathroom. The two holes on Duchamp's wooden door are transformed by Gloeckner, and whereas in *Étant Donnés* spectators have visual access to an open field, the broken glass on the bathroom door can provide insight into the most private room of a family house. The public exaggerated voyeuristic process that Duchamp's installation evokes is transported back to the private domain. In addition, the spectators in this case are the two underage girls and what they are about to gaze at does not concern an unknown person-less body, but Pascal, their mother's boyfriend, in a scene of masturbation (see Burris 2017; Michael "The Other" 2018). On this page, Gloeckner's reproduction of the Duchampian treatment of voyeuristic drives becomes discomforting and disturbing because, as I further explain below, it presents an example of active adult male sexuality, the formation of its belatedly injurious effect on the child protagonist, and the impact this might have on the reader.

Even though on the title page there is no access to what happens inside the bathroom, the subheading in French: "'Or, 'Étant Donnés: le Bain, le Pere, la Main, la Bitte'" and then in Czech and Urdu foreshadows what is about to follow (Gloeckner 2000, 27).[12] While Glockner's choice of French for the title is an element preserved from the artistic predecessor, I read the Czech and Urdu translations as means that invest the incident with global dimensions through a metonymic function that alludes to Eastern Europe and India, respectively. As such, these translations suggest that similar cases of incest take place in other geographical areas, beyond the boundaries of the US.[13] The elements found in the title of Duchamp's installation and in the artwork itself, – the illuminating glass and the waterfall – are replaced by four words that describe a private space, "the bath," a family member, "the father," and two body parts, "the hand" and "the cock." Gloeckner's word choice situates obscene sexual matter within the family domain, both structurally, in the family itself, and spatially, in the family's dwelling place, and associates it with the father figure, even if Pascal

is not biologically related to the girls. The title, then, prepares the reader for what is to be presented on the next page.

The subsequent full-page panel moves further into the scene previously described. Approaching the bathroom door with the two girls, readers watch Pascal, sitting on the edge of the bathtub in a scene of masturbation, returning his gaze to the girls, and to them, with a head and an erect penis being disproportionately large. The subheading of the previous page is translated into the visual register and the father figure is introduced as a sexual spectacle. In Hillary Chute's words, the absence of agency and activity in Duchamp's installation "becomes a confrontational presence" in this full-page panel (2010, 72). Unlike Duchamp's woman, Pascal's body is strong, fully captured and his active sexuality is shown both by his masturbation and by his returning gaze at the two girls, who are forced to visually interact with him.

Readers are thus engaged with Minnie and her sister, in a process whereby father/daughter relations become overtly sexual, despite being restricted in the visual field. Pascal holds a place conventionally attributed to women, and the underage girls are placed in the position of the spectator. Nevertheless, his muscularity, his grotesquely large, erect penis and his head maintain his dominance, while he also preserves the privilege of the gaze together with the control over his sexual pleasure.[14] By drawing him as such, Gloeckner, even more disturbingly than Duchamp, situates readers in the position of the Peeping Tom and of the visual object at the same time. Vision as consumption of sexuality is different from *Étant Donnés* because its female spectacle is unable to show traces of activity through an implicating return of her gaze. Consequently, active and passive roles are more clearly cut in Duchamp's piece.

As a reader, in "Hommage," I am called to think about who I (dis)identify with. In identifying with the girls, I see a shocking, invasive spectacle. Alternatively, perceiving

Pascal's return of the gaze as a mirroring technique that allows me to see myself and my gaze in his, implies that I am as guilty as he is, in how I also voyeuristically consume the figure of the girl as a sexual spectacle, not necessarily in this chapter, but through the graphic memoir as a whole. The difference, therefore, between Courbet's, Duchamp's and Gloeckner's treatment of the spectacle concerns the visual embodiment of sexualities, which neither allows, in *L'Origine* and *Étant Donnés,* the unsettling of gender positions existing in Gloeckner's text, nor has the same affective and political impact by showing what happens in the autobiographical subject's household.

Courbet's and Duchamp's artworks are experienced differently from *A Child's Life* because they are unique pieces existing in the controlled space of a museum and do not form parts of a larger narrative. In *A Child's Life*, the bathroom panel is understood as a part of a bigger whole, the chapter in which it is situated, and, to a different extent, the graphic memoir. It takes up a whole page preceding another with three smaller panels showing the girls' reactions afterwards, contrasting their size (fig. 2). Its significance is therefore indicated by the way it is *re-membered* in the narrative (see also Køhlert 2015). Chute distinguishes between "a single information-dense photograph" and comics, noting that the latter always call "attention to the relationship of part to whole" (2016, 17). She explains that the gutter, i.e. the space between panels, is "where readers project causality from frame to frame," and it paradoxically suggests "stillness (the framed moment inscribed in space on page) and movement (as the viewer animates the relationship between the frames that indicate time to create the sequential narrative meaning of the page)" (16). The bathroom scene consequently complicates the narrative of Minnie's sexual abuse by adding to it a double layer of meaning as we try to move from one panel to another and to connect narrative fragments. This panel captures Pascal's masturbation with the girls functioning as visual objects and spectators. Thus, it alludes to the objectification of the female body as that is displayed in the tradition of

the realist nude in Western visual arts from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, implicitly evoking public and private discourses that frame women and girls as sexual spectacles (see also Burris 2017).

The third and final page of "Hommage" (fig. 2) includes three panels depicting the girls' reactions after having seen Pascal. The first one, a close-up to the two girls' faces, shows them with their backs turned to the bathroom door, looking surprised and somewhat scared. The second, of the same length but about a third of the height of the first panel, presents a long-distance take on Minnie and her sister running away from the bathroom door. Its difference in size with the first and the third panels, and its depiction of two doors – that of the bathroom and another – at the opposite ends of the wall, underscore the distance the two girls cover running away from the scene. Chute explains that the bathroom panel sets in motion "undecidable directions and tenors of looking (shame, desire, confusion). Minnie and her sister are both attracted and repulsed, and we watch them as we watch ourselves, aware of our own spectatorship" (2010, 72). This access to the girls' reactions after the incident points to the affective impact the scene had on them. In the last panel, in another close-up take, Minnie asks her sister: "Do you think he saw us? What do you think he was doing?" to which her sister replies speculating that "maybe he was washing his penis" (Gloeckner 2000, 29). The two sisters lack the knowledge to name the incident for what it was. Their facial expressions and that they run away from the bathroom door suggest the feelings described by Chute. This interpretation of the bathroom panel, however, can only take place retrospectively, once the girls' features and their later actions and dialogues – as those are understood by the reader – are also taken into consideration.

Fig.2: page 29 from *A Child's Life and Other Stories* by Phoebe Gloeckner, published by Frog Books/North Atlantic Books, copyright © 1998, 2000 by Phoebe Gloeckner. Reprinted by permission of publisher.

In structuring the father figure as a sexual spectacle, “Hommage” visually embodies what Sigmund Freud described as the daughter’s seduction in the family domain, despite its being embedded in the visual register. Freud’s “seduction theory” introduced the belated psychological impact of the sexual abuse of children younger than ten years old by adults in the family domain. Freud explained that “it is not the experiences themselves which act traumatically but their revival as a memory after the subject has entered on sexual maturity,” thus formulating the theory of *Nachträglichkeit* ([1896] 2001, 163). That in “Hommage” the two girls are shown wondering what Pascal was doing suggests that at the time this incident took place they lacked the knowledge to conceptualize it. It is only in Gloeckner’s later *re-membering* of it, its artistic recreation in *A Child’s Life*, and readers’ consumption of it that it can become invested with traumatic impact.

Writing in 1896, 30 years after Courbet’s *L’Origine* was painted, Freud foregrounded the gendered responsibilities emerging in cases of seduction, implicitly lifting responsibility from the abuser, by explaining that “even in childhood [members of the female sex] are more liable to *provoke* (emphasis mine) sexual attacks” ([1896] 2001, 162). Despite initially acknowledging children’s seduction by adults, in a later footnote to his essay, he clarified that he was “inclined to think that the stories of being assaulted which hysterics so frequently invent[ed] may [have been] obsessional fictions [arising] from the memory-trace of a childhood trauma” (163; see also Masson 1992). Sexual abuse became a figment of the hysterical daughter’s imagination and was caused by her Oedipal sexual instincts towards her father. Her account was found unreliable and she became silenced to establish paternal authority (see also Froula 1986). From the nineteenth century and Freud’s rejection of the “seduction theory,” to the late-twentieth century and the discourse on the “false memory syndrome,” that “warns against the fabrication or exaggeration of child abuse narratives –

offering protection to parents" the sexually abused daughter's narrative has been received at best with scepticism and at worst with hostility (Douglas 2010, 109).

Currently, however, we are witnessing a change not in relation to incest in particular, but rather, concerning the broader problem of sexual violence in relation to how girls' and women's testimonies of abuse are treated. Unlike the aforementioned disbelief and consequent silencing, the #MeToo movement has caused an unpreceded stream of girls' and women's testimonies of sexual suffering that are no longer unheard, disbelieved and unseen, putting an end to the silencing of abuse survivors. The trial of Larry Nassar, doctor of the USA gymnastics team, during which more than 150 girls and women survivors shared their stories of childhood and adolescent sexual abuse in court, proved to be a landmark in relation to the juridical treatment of such cases, by foregrounding the impact of the plethora of these stories and a shift in terms of how they are received (Kraft 2018). Julian V. Roberts and Edna Erez (2004) write in relation to Victim Impact Statements (VIS) that the "absence of victim input" from criminal justice proceedings led to measures for the empowerment of victims by offering them voice during sentencing. These measures included the incorporation of VIS aiming at addressing "victims' perceived 'justice needs' and [promoting their] psychological welfare" (Roberts and Erez 2004, 226; see also Erez 1994; Sebba 1996). Apart from their influence on survivors, VIS can help judges and juries form a more informed opinion about the crimes they sentence (Kraft 2018). In Nassar's case, the judge had to listen for a week to massive number of such statements, which had a significant impact on the sentence of the accused that reached 175 years in jail, precisely because they were believed (ibid; see also Carey 2018).

Juridical processes relating to sexual assault accusations against Bill Cosby also reflect a change in terms of how women survivors' testimonies are handled. Jeannie Suk Gersen notes that Cosby's "trial and […] retrial, divided neatly into pre- and post-#MeToo events, […]

promised to show in real time, the legal impact of a young social movement" (2018, n.pag.). The judge appeared to acknowledge the social changes caused by #MeToo and the need to implement those in the American jury system. During the retrial, the jury consisted of more millennials than in the trial and heard five additional testimonies to the one heard before, with dozens more women accusing Cosby of sexual assaults that took place within a period of fifty years (Suk Gersen 2018). As Suk Gersen puts it, "a basic concept of #MeToo is the power of numbers across time: the difference between a single victim whose account might not be believed, and the choruses of 'me too' that make the individual's account that much more believable" (2018, n.pag.).

Alongside testimonies in courts, young women go public online, giving accounts of sexual abuse they suffered at university campuses, in film festivals, and elsewhere (see Chu 2017). In her recently published *Girls, Autobiography, Media: Gender and Self-Mediation in Digital Economies*, Emma Maguire (2018) writes that social media has given an unpreceded agency to girls and young women, allowing them to claim the expression of their identities, and voice through digital autobiographical texts their own perspectives on what girlhood is. This agency seems to have facilitated the disturbance of the silence surrounding the endemic problem of sexual abuse. What we are currently witnessing, as evidenced by the examples of Nassar and Cosby, is a shift caused by young women's life narratives, which are now unsettling juridical processes because they are heard and believed. Moving beyond the boundaries of courtrooms, young women and girls expose abuse online though social media, which function as channels of "alternative jurisdiction[s]" (Gilmore 2003, 715). Watching the impact of these testimonial life narratives on the juridical system itself, I argue that *A Child's Life* is a very important text because it functions as an artistic VIS and a precursor to the current stories heard in courts and beyond. Gloeckner's graphic memoir not only deconstructs the power of abusive father figures, both metaphorical and literal, by excessively exposing

their violence, but fuses revisionist references to the male-dominated artistic canon with evocations of women's body-positive art in the display of Minnie's sexual abuse.

Closely Reading *A Child's Life* II: Situating Gloeckner's Graphic Memoir in the Tradition of Second-Wave Feminist Art

A central component of second-wave feminist art is the affirmation of female body and its embodied experiences, as depicted from the perspective of women artists (see Tickner 1987; Wentrack 2014). Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago, for example, whose art concerns visual displays of their own, at times menstruating, nude bodies are rendered both agents and visual objects through their art. This double role also applies to women creators of self-referential comics from Kominsky-Crumb to Gloeckner. While women's autobiographical comics have not been extensively discussed in relation to second-wave feminist art displayed in museums and art galleries, Alicia Chase identifies similarities between them, proposing that the "cultural chasm" between "biological gender and its embodied experiences" may become bridged more easily via the medium of comics (2013, 214). She mentions Carolee Schneemann's performance *Interior Scroll* (1975), the most striking part of which consists of the artist standing on a table, disrobing herself, inserting her hand in her vagina and taking out a scroll from which she starts reading to the audience what seems to "originate in her womb" (207). She situates Schneemann's work and desire to show that "the female body could be a source of pride rather than the shame many male artists […] imbued it with" in the context of second-wave "cunt-positivity," and quotes the artist's declaration that her "'culture denies females an honorable genital'" (225). Further, she explains that "Schneemann wanted to assert that the vaginal canal was the place where both biological, and by extension, cultural, creativity originate" (225).

Chase's analysis and Schneemann's work evoke Courbet's *L'Origine*, where at a first glance the title of the painting seems to refer to the vagina that is realistically depicted.

However, this correlation can be questioned: Is the origin of the world, the artistically recreated vagina, or the hands of the (always-already) male painter, and to a different extent the male God who has created the world and the maternal body? As Barzilai proposes, the painting "reenacts the story of Genesis by presenting the creation of woman out of male materials. In other words, the origin of the world is not to be found in the represented image, in the partial figure of the female nude, but rather in the male artist-creator-originator who gives shape and meaning to that body as to the blank matter of a canvas surface" (1999, 11). The ambiguity of the title and the passivity that accompanies the female nude in the painting and in Duchamp's later installation are absent from second-wave feminist art. Schneeman, the artist, is also the object and the agent reading what comes out of her womb. Unlike *Interior Scroll*, however, Gloeckner's revision of *Étant Donnés* and to a different extent, of *L'Origine*, situates the father figure in a dominant position despite the role reversal in terms of who the nude spectacle is. In "Hommage," the two girls do not escape Pascal's voyeuristic gaze and their status as spectacles and they lack the agency to control what they are looking at in any way other than averting their gaze.

Chase does not refer to the connections between Courbet's, Schneemann's and Gloeckner's works. She mentions, nevertheless, Judy Chicago's photolithograph, *Red Flag* (1971), a close-up of the artist's vagina with her hand pulling out a blooded tampon as forming an example of the second-wave attempt to break the taboo against menstruation. Moreover, she draws parallels between that and the "Developmental Developments" chapter, where Minnie visits her neighbour Cheryl to find out that her friend started menstruating (Chase 2013). Cheryl gives Minnie a sanitary towel as a gift and their discussion is interrupted when the former's father enters the room to beat her with a metal leash because she needed to be punished for having "left the milk on the counter" (Gloeckner 2000, 43). Chase argues that this chapter "encapsulates the public and private humiliation of being a

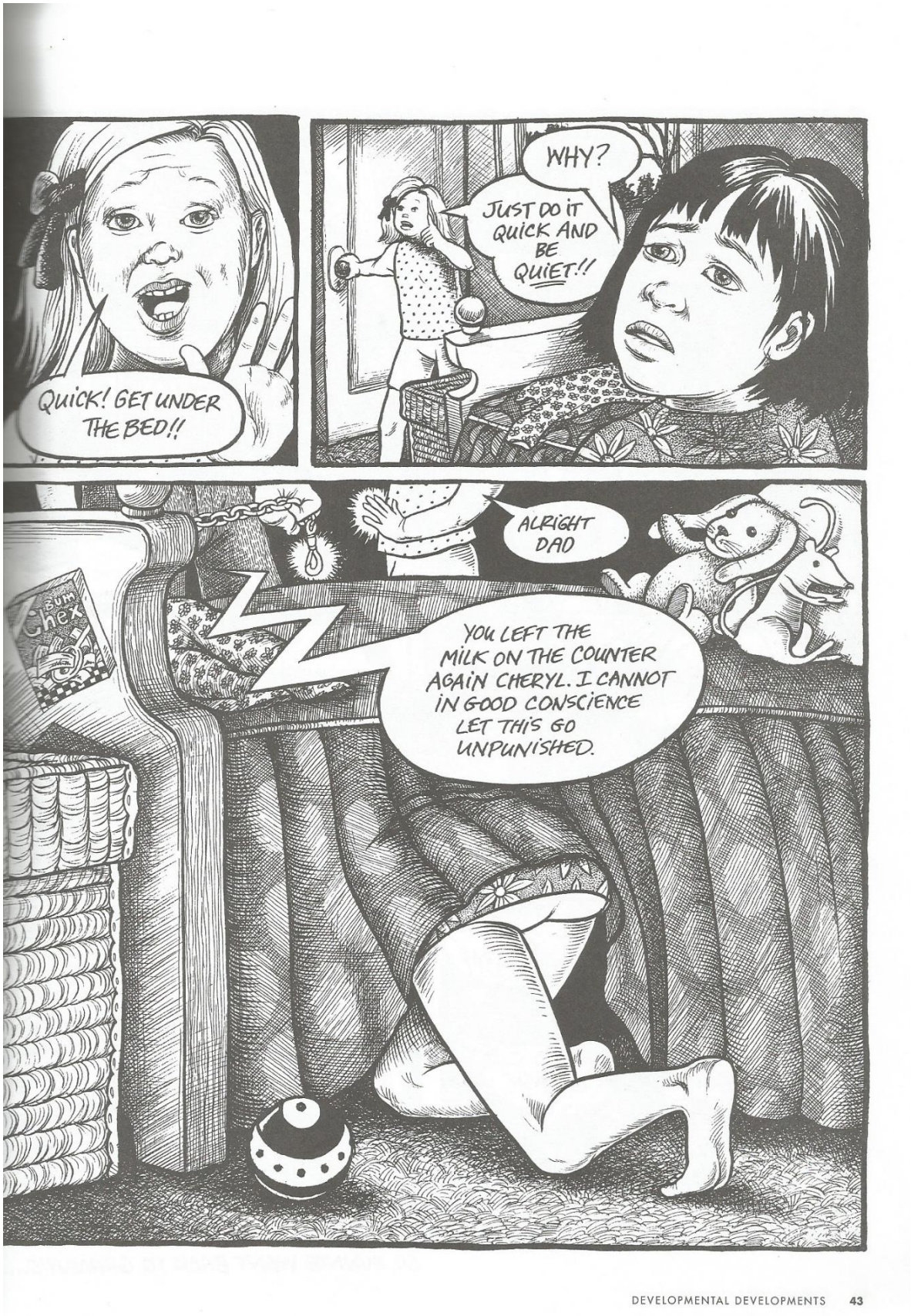

Fig.3: page 43 from *A Child's Life and Other Stories* by Phoebe Gloeckner, published by Frog Books/North Atlantic Books, copyright © 1998, 2000 by Phoebe Gloeckner. Reprinted by permission of publisher.

'woman'" (2013, 230). However, it is with pride that the girl shows Minnie her blooded underwear and informs her that she got her period earlier than her sister (Gloeckner 2000). Humiliation, then, is not related to menstruation, but rather, it is caused by Minnie being a witness to the incident of paternal abuse.

Cheryl's father holds the leash straight in front of his genitals and his speech balloon informing her that she has to be punished emanates from the same area (fig. 3). That the balloon is drawn above Minnie who crawls trying to hide under the bed shows that his behaviour affects both girls, Cheryl directly and Minnie, who listens to what happens, indirectly. Unlike Pascal in the bathroom panel, Cheryl's father is clothed and similarly to the Duchampian woman, he is fragmented since his face is not in our visual field and there is a focus on his genital area. Irrespective of this, this father figure is also powerful and abusive and Cheryl bleeds both because she is becoming a woman and because of his violent behaviour against her. While violence is not explicitly displayed as sexual here, that both verbal and physical abuse derive from the paternal phallus could imply it, suggesting, at the same time, that this is another case of a violent imposition of the father's power on his daughter. As opposed to the feminist art of Schneemann and Chicago, therefore, Gloeckner's depictions of genitals and menstrual blood in *A Child's Life* foreground girls' vulnerability and violation in an abject way.

Apart from "Developmental Developments" and moving from "A Child's Life" to "Teen Stories," "Minnie's 3rd Love" also evokes and reconfigures feminist "cunt-positive" art and Duchamp's tradition at the same time. In this case too, however, Gloeckner's visual illustration of Minnie's menstruation is there to underscore her dehumanization and her sexual suffering and not to present a feminist body-positive image. The particular chapter visually captures various forms of sexual abuse Minnie suffered when she was fifteen years

old and had an affair with her mother's boyfriend. During the same time, she fell in love with Tabatha, a girl who had sex for drugs and involved Minnie in this activity. One of the most disturbing panels depicts the autobiographical avatar on her knees, crying, with a bottle of wine in her hand and forced to perform fellatio by Monroe, her mother's boyfriend who is drawn to look much older than her (see also Michael "Graphic" 2018).[15] The following page informs us about Minnie's infatuation with Tabatha, "who did not exactly have romantic designs on [her]. Rather, she was primarily focused on taking drugs and getting more" (Gloeckner 2000, 74). In the visual realm of the same panel, Tabatha gives Minnie six Quaaludes and proposes that they "hang out with Lance and Gary" (74).

On the next page, a caption in the first panel explains that they spent the first day of the New Year with Tabatha's friends. Moving to the second panel, we see Minnie passed out because of the drugs. The third panel, which takes up more than half the size of the page, contains excessive information both visually and verbally in relation to Minnie's sexual violation. This excess is demonstrated by the number of speech balloons mediating a dialogue between Tabatha and Lance, who are watching TV in the background, with their backs turned away from a scene that is possibly going to escalate into rape, and who are wondering what to eat with complete disinterest in Minnie's condition. Visually, excess is displayed through the autobiographical avatar's passivity, the nudity of both herself and Gary, the exposure of their genitals and the latter's erection. Minnie is passed out, lacking traces of activity; her legs are spread and her breasts are also visible. Her head, unlike Duchamp's and Courbet's women is not cut off from view. Rather, as she lies on a bed unconscious, it is turned towards readers, and her eyes closed. Gary is standing on the right side of the panel, near Minnie with an erection that is disturbingly visible near her vagina, with his hand having taken a blooded tampon out of her body and with his head outside the frame of the panel. When Lance asks him if he needs something to eat, he replies that he has what he wants also noting that Minnie

is “on the rag – she’s got a goddamn mouse in her pussy” (Gloeckner 2000, 75). The narrator’s captions inform readers that “Tabatha acted as procuress for low-life drug dealers. She’d bring fucked-up kids to have sex with such creeps [and] she’d get liquor and drugs in return. Their New Year’s Eve date turned into a week-long nightmare of sex [and] drug taking” (75).

I would argue that in this panel, as readers we are forced to face a dehumanization and a humiliation of the female subject that is much more horrific than what is displayed in Duchamp’s and Courbet’s artworks. Having read stories from Minnie’s childhood and adolescence, having invested her with personhood and having seen incidents of implicit and explicit sexual abuse, to look at her in this panel, is an emotionally charged activity, very different from the experience of *L’Origine* and *Étant Donnés*. The angle through which Minnie’s body is depicted allows her face to be seen but her eyes are closed and she is unable to respond. Further, she is placed next to a man who is about to force himself into her and who jokes about her tampon, while Tabatha and Lance are indifferently watching TV.

Minnie’s positioning in the panel can be read as a repetition and simultaneous reconfiguration of the woman in Courbet’s painting and Duchamp’s installation. At the same time, the blooded tampon also alludes to the feminist tradition of body positive art that refuses to hide or deprecate the menstruating body. Instead of presenting an emancipatory depiction however, Gloeckner’s artistic choices repeatedly reduce the autobiographical body to a passive, violated and wounded object while also inconveniently foregrounding its humanness. Gloeckner very consciously takes what Chute describes as “the risk of representation,” inviting us “to rethink the dominant tropes of unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility that have tended to characterize trauma theory as well as our current censorship-driven culture in general” by vizualizing Minnie’s abuse (Chute 2010, 16). Jane Tolmie (2013) and Chute (2010) both describe the censorship the book has faced, but its negative

reception and its characterization as pornography show less about the graphic memoir itself and more about the readiness of the public to face, or rather, *to look at* incest and sexual objectification.

In her discussion on the control of the circulation of photographs of torture in Abu Grhaib prisons in Iraq by the Bush government, Susan Sontag notes the "displacement of the reality onto the photographs themselves […] as if the fault or horror lay in the images, not in what they depict" (2004, n.pag.). She further observes that "perhaps the torture is more attractive, as something to record, when it has a sexual component," aptly pointing out that despite efforts to control them, "pictures will continue to 'assault' us" (n. pag.). It is this ability of visual images that I want to underscore, and which in Gloeckner's *A Child's Life* becomes shocking and discomforting (and thus censored), precisely because her pictures capture scenes of sexual violence in the form of incest and otherwise. The pictures that have the power to "assault" us do so because they force us to gaze at these scenes. Cartoonists have the option to tamper with the material they present and comics, as a sequential medium, express emotional truth and traumatic impact in ways that are different from their photographic negotiations (see Hatfield 2005).[16] In cases of childhood abuse, the medium allows a filtering of the events through the cartoonist/survivor's eyes, in ways that can mediate complex emotional, rather than factual, truths (see also Hatfield 2005; El Refaie 2010; Rifkind and Warley 2016; Michael "Graphic" 2018).

Gloeckner's graphic memoir is disturbing and at the same time important and political because it exposes a sexual abuse survivor's emotional truth through Gloeckner's artistic vision. The role of readers in meaning formation is crucial, because they are called to actively interact with the text, to fill in the gaps and provide "closure" (see McCloud 1994, 132). The very nature of a comics narrative is fragmented. It consists of panels, gutters, narrators' captions, autobiographical avatars or the visual embodiments of the autobiographical

subjects, speech and thought balloons and dialogues between characters. Meaning formation requires that the reader puts fragments together, projects connections between the aforementioned building blocks of the narrative and provides coherence, or what Scott McCloud calls "closure." When it comes to *A Child's Life*, this is a heavily affective and complex process. The disturbing nature of Gloeckner's images makes one want to look away – to avert his or her gaze away from the injurious spectacle that simultaneously triggers voyeuristic curiosity (see Chute 2010). Readers in general and life-writing and comics scholars in particular are faced with different options. One of them would be to *look away*, similarly to Tabatha and Lance as described above, to choose not to engage with such a painful text, and in its extreme form, to agree with the censorship of such material. Another would be to *look at* Gloeckner's images and to face their visual capturing of Minnie's violation. A third option would be both to *look at* and *into* her images, to perform an intertextual reading, to research the archive from which she borrows and to examine both the primary texts and her own recreations alongside the depiction of sexual violence. This is by no means an easy task, but it is essential.

Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw note that a "reader's involvement with the painful details of another's story entails both the pleasures of the imagination and the defences of personal boundaries – and these reactions shape the exercise of identification across the borders of the unfamiliar" (2002, 19). As a reader gazing at scenes of torture, there are moments when one might want to close the book and look away (see also Miller and Tougaw 2002). This is exaggerated in graphic childhood sexual trauma narratives because of their visuality. To see, in such cases, may be to become wounded. To a different extent, in reading, it is I, the reader, who will decide whether *A Child's Life* is mere pornography, a sexual trauma narrative or something in-between. My active, critical engagement with the text will determine how it will function. Kate Douglas explains that "in consuming traumatic

autobiographies," readers can develop "empathic relationships with the subjects," or "a form of voyeurism or schadenfreude' (2010, 152). The ability of a text, and more so, of a visual image, to turn a reader from a sympathetic to an abusive one, through a series of (dis)identifications has a lot to do with what Chute defines as the "risk of representation" (2010, 16). If one's reading is empathic, then the text can become a testimony, functioning as an "alternative jurisdiction," where the crime is acknowledged and the survivor is heard and understood by the reader who also becomes a secondary witness (Gilmore 2003, 715; see also Jensen and Jolly 2014; Scherr 2015).

Douglas proposes that reading as witnessing "can raise awareness, challenge historical knowledge, shift power relationships, and redress inequalities" (2010, 152). The aim of my reading as witnessing has been to examine the negotiation of sexual violence in *A Child's Life* and to show how Gloeckner's use of misogynist and feminist art traditions informs the domestic trauma narrative, and performs a critique to the patriarchal representation of the girl and the woman as passive sexual spectacles. Miller and Tougaw write that literary critics investigating traumatic autobiographies "look to meet if not to match the wounds of others. We demonstrate a willingness to be bruised, to have our indifference challenged. Reading for the extreme is a way to consider the politics of empathy and acknowledge the limits of our civic engagement" (2002, 18). Critical engagement with Gloeckner's works can be discomforting, wounding and painful. It can, however, also be what allows one to share its political significance by explicating the complexities and the difficulties that accompany the consumption of such texts.

Edward Said writes in his introduction to Joe Sacco's *Palestine* that comics can "say what [can't] otherwise be said, perhaps what [isn't] permitted to be said or imagined, defying the ordinary processes of thought, which are policed, shaped and re-shaped by all sorts of pedagogical as well as ideological pressures" (2005, ii). Marianne Hirsch explains how Art

Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) became a counter-narrative to the mainstream representations of the fall of the World Trade Centre by depicting Spiegelman's uncensored "traumatic seeing" of the events at a time when their mainstream media representations were controlled and sanitized (2004, 1213). For Hirsch, similarly to Said, comics "reveal the limited obstructed vision that characterizes a historical moment ruled by trauma and censorship" (1213).

Shifting attention away from public to private and gendered forms of trauma, I have shown how the possibility Hirsch and Said describe can work in relation to the representation of sexual violence and its effect on the underage girl protagonist. When it comes to *A Child's Life*, censorship – which the book has underwent – concerns the visual depiction of what many girls see and experience in their everyday lives (see Orenstein 2001). It was not the fact of abuse itself, but Gloeckner's comics depiction of it that seemed, when the book was censored, harmful. Graphic life narratives of (sexual) trauma, as Rebecca Scherr writes, "shape an ethics of looking at – and therefore of reading – other people's pain" (2013, 134). As such, they attribute responsibility to life-writing and comics scholars, as well as readers in general, precisely because through their reading acts they can become secondary witnesses to trauma, acknowledging the complex testimonies given through a comics text.

Reading *A Child's Life* Now: Lolicon and #MeToo

While *A Child's Life* has been censored and does not exist in most mainstream bookshops, sexualisation and sexual violence against underage girls prevails in visual arts and literature (Chute 2010). Olga Michael has written on Gloeckner's intertextual references to Duchamp's *Étant Donnés*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Edgar Allan Poe's *Collected Works*, William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and Donald Henderson Clarke's *The Chastity of Gloria Boyd*.[17] She proposes that Gloeckner's artistic decision to include, in Minnie's narrative, works by these authors produces a patchwork of cases of sexual abuse and incest

that occurred in the US over the course of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and are partly reflected in or have inspired male art and literature (Michael "The Other," 2018). Referring to Nabokov's prototype of what was to become the "Lolita craze," the sexual fascination with adolescent and pre-adolescent girls, she explains that his fictional "nymphet" and her affair with a middle-aged literature professor are reconfigured in *A Child's Life*, to present the story from the girl's perspective, bringing to the fore the traumatic impact of the relationship. In so doing, Gloeckner's graphic memoir becomes a counter-narrative that reacts to the silencing of the female figure in the aforementioned text (see also Michael 2014).

Lolicon, short for "Lolita Complex" and an allusion to Nabokov's tale is "the name of a genre that involves the sexual objectification of pre-pubescent girls" and prevails in Japanese culture as well; particularly, in manga and anime (Brienza 2010, 112; see also Galbraith 2011; Kittredge 2014). Sexualized versions of underage girls in relationships with much older men have also been quite common in Hollywood films from Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita* (1962) to Luc Besson's *Leon: The Professional* (1994) and Louis C.K.'s *I Love You Daddy* (2017) among many others. Molly Haskell writes that "male directors have endlessly projected their sexual fantasies in films starring child actors having relationships with older men" and lists a number of examples (2018, n. pag.; see also Sinclair 1988). Debra Merskin further notes "the 'pornographication of the American girl' […] in television programs, movies, video games, music videos, magazines, and popular culture" (2004, 121; see also Walkerdine, 1997; Maguire 2018).

Sexualizing images of girls reach us through social media too (see de Vries and Jochen 2013; de Vries et al. 2015). In *A Child's Life*, Minnie's reading of Clarke Henderson's and Nabokov's Lolitas, Poe's vulnerable and sickly child mistresses and Buroughs' violated youth, together with her own sexualisation in the domestic domain lead her to understand

herself first and foremost as a sexual object (see Orenstein 2001; Gloeckner 2000; Michael 2014). Consequently, and given her mother's absence from her life, Minnie falls prey to Monroe and others who manipulate and abuse her (see Michael "The Other" 2018). The graphic memoir therefore shows, on the one hand, Minnie's passive reception and internalization of these sexualizing discourses and the injury they bring along, and on the other, Gloeckner's adult reinterpretation of them, which fuses misogynist and feminist traditions in the artistic exposure of the autobiographical subject's sexual trauma.

In 2007, the American Psychological Association Task Force issued a report on the injurious effect of girls' sexualisation through the media. According to the report, a significant concern is that "frequent exposure to media images that sexualize girls and women may affect how girls conceptualize femininity and sexuality, leading them to accept more constrained and stereotypical notions about gender roles and sexual roles (i.e., that women are sexual objects)" (31). When these conceptualizations are internalized we come across cases of self-objectification, which "has been linked directly to diminished sexual health among adolescent girls," it can cause "body shame," and lead to eating disorders (30). Victimization stemming from childhood sexual abuse, "an extreme form of sexualization, one that always involves both sexual objectification and the inappropriate imposition of sexuality," is also a possible outcome of girls' media sexualization (32).

While the APA Task Force Report has been criticized for ignoring reader response to sexualizing discourses, the extent to which girls can critically engage with them depends on their awareness of their possible outcomes.[18] At a time when girls are surrounded by sexualizing images of adolescent and adult femininity, how they consume and internalize them needs to be addressed (see also Maguire 2018). At this point, I want to clarify that my aim is not to make a pro-censorship argument. Rather, it is to underscore the usefulness of reading *A Child's Life* alongside counter-narratives that mute the female subject and frame it

as a passive objectified sexual spectacle, and to foreground its display of Gloeckner's critical engagement with images of sexualisation and sexual violence.

Christine Froula writes that,

> For the literary daughter – the woman reader/writer as daughter of her culture – the metaphysical violence against women inscribed in the literary tradition, although more subtle and no less difficult to acknowledge and understand, has serious consequences. Metaphysically, the woman reader of a literary tradition that inscribes violence against women is an abused daughter. Like physical abuse, literary violence against women works to privilege the cultural father's voice and story over those of women, the cultural daughters, and indeed to silence women's voices. (1986, 633)

As an artistic daughter and reader of canonical patriarchal artworks that discursively violate and silence women, Gloeckner does not remain restricted within the gender and sexuality formations they prescribe. In her feminist revision of them, she critically reconfigures their metaphysical violence by exposing it from the survivor's perspective. This is precisely where the cultural significance of a sexual trauma narrative told via the medium of comics lies. In their condensed nature, comics can complicate and enrich the meanings of such life narratives as well as the way readers experience them.

Gloeckner's pictures are as Chute notes "consistently informed by trauma" deriving from Minnie's sexual abuse (2010, 61). They also have the power to transmit this trauma to the reader who is forced to see what happens in the domestic domain but remains silenced, and what has become a naturalized process in the public cultural domain through the depiction of the girl and the woman as voiceless, passive sexual spectacles available in the service of adult male heterosexuality. Gloeckner's depiction of sexual trauma is an important feminist

statement because in its "risk of representation" it situates readers in uncomfortable positions and forces us to recognize the injurious effect of sexualisation. Her pictures "assault" us and in so doing they raise awareness about the pain that comes along with sexual violence. In the midst of #MeToo, a time that presents a change in relation to the impact women's and girls' testimonies of sexual abuse, reading critically, as Gloeckner does, the narratives that form gendered identities around us can alter their power. *A Child's Life* shows that women's graphic memoirs of sexual trauma can be read as counter-narratives to the mainstream sexual objectification of girls and women and through this essay, I hope to have demonstrated that scholarly engagement with such painful, discomforting texts matters precisely because it brings to the fore their political significance.

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[1] Duchamp (1887-1968), the French-American father of postmodern conceptual art, was the first to introduce readymade objects and materials in his artworks with his infamous urinal, entitled *The Fountain* (1917), being his most representative piece. *Étant Donnés*, translated in English as *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Glass*, is one of his most controversial works and it depicts a three-dimensional nude woman lying in an open space with no traces of life apart from her raised arm (see Honold 2016). Saul Ostrow describes Duchamp's distinct "brand of anti-aesthetic practices," which challenges conventional perceptions of what art is (2013, x). Courbet (1819-1877) is a French painter and father of nineteenth-century, realist "retinal" art with *L'Origine*, the close-up depiction of a vagina, being his most controversial piece (see Hentschel 2002).

[2] Feminist poet and philosopher Adrienne Rich writes that "re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women […] an act of survival" (1972, 18). Rich's comment concerns, however, a revision of the archive of women's art and literature for the creation of a maternal canon that would counter that of the fathers. In this essay, I examine the potential of an artistic daughter's

revisionist engagement with canonical fathers' works in relation to second-wave women's feminist art.

[3] The US underground scene of the 1960s and 1970s is where the genre of autobiographical comics emerged as a reaction to Fredrick Wertham's "Comics Code," a set of censoring rules imposed on mainstream comics during the 1950s, which were believed to contribute to juvenile delinquency. Underground comics was a male-dominated genre with Robert Crumb, its initiator, extensively drawing scenes of rape in his work. Countering the machismo of the underground scene, women cartoonists started producing their own autobiographical comics with the initiator of the genre being Aline Kominsky-Crumb, the former's wife. Women's underground comics include stories of sexual experimentation and abuse (see Sabin 1993; Robbins 1999; Merino 2001; Kominsky-Crumb 2007; Chute 2010; Michael 2014)

[4] I use the term graphic memoir to refer to the book versions of autobiographical comics that flourished during the turn of the twentieth to the twenty-first century, after Art Spiegelman's landmark *Maus: A Survivor's Tale and My Father Bleeds History* (1986), which signalled the legitimation of the genre, its circulation in book forms as opposed to comic strips in newspapers and magazines, and the academic turn to it (see Bradley 2013; Michael 2017)

[5] I refer to Laura Mulvey's schema as described in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" whereby the male subject is the bearer of the gaze and the female object, invested with "to-be-looked-at-ness" holds the position of the spectacle (436; see also Berger 1972).

[6] For photographic reproductions of the installation, see http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/65633.html.

[7] Jerrold Seigel explains that *Étant Donnés* is an "illustration of [Courbet's realist] retinal art" as presented in *L'Origine* (1995, 111). For a photographic reproduction of Courbet's painting, see http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in focus/search.html?no_cache=1&zoom=1&tx_damzoom_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=2406.

[8] Drucilla Cornell defines heterosexual pornography as the "explicit presentation and depiction of sexual organs and sexual acts with the aim of arousing sexual feeling through either (a) the portrayal of violence and coercion against women as the basis of heterosexual desire or (b) the graphic depiction of a woman's body as dismembered by her being reduced to her sex and stripped completely of personhood" (1995, 106; see also MacKinnon 2006).

[9] Elsewhere, Olga Michael reads Duchamp's influence on Gloeckner's graphic memoir as a means that connects the extreme sexual crime against the young American actress known as the Black Dahlia, which took place in 1947, with the contemporary subtle version of abuse that Minnie suffered because of her sexualisation by Pascal in the domestic domain ("The Other," 2018).

[10] Two examples of such re-readings include Orlan's revisionist take on Duchamp's *Etant Donnés* in her *Documentary Study: The Head of Medusa* (1981) and her parody of Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, entitled *L'Origine de la Guerre* (1989), photographic reproductions of which can be seen here: http://www.paris-art.com/lorigine-de-la-guerre/ (for analyses of Orlan's works see Jeffries 2009; Knafo 2009).

[11] Meaning creation has been perceived as an interactive process in visual culture studies (see Jones and Stephenson 1999; Mirzoeff 1999; Betterton 2003; Jones 2003; Brison 2004).

[12] Chute translates the subtitle as "the bath, the father, the hand, the cock" (2010, 71).

[13] Gloeckner insists that her texts aim to formulate collective rather than personal stories: "I aspire," she notes, "to create characters who can be universally understood despite being constructed with details so numerous that they could only refer to a particular situation […]. It is not my story. It's our story" (2011, 179).

[14] Richard Dyer explains in his analysis of male pinups that a disruption of balance takes place when placing a male model in the role of the spectacle and a woman in that of the spectator, because this distribution violates "the codes of who looks and who is looked at

(and how)" (1993, 104). Nevertheless, "some attempt is instinctively made to counteract this violation" (104). The spectacle's return of the gaze to the female spectator and the display of 'phallic' muscularity are two such examples.

[15] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) define the drawn depictions of the narrated "I" in graphic narratives as autobiographical avatars.

[16] In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler (2016) explains that a photograph is always a partial subjective interpretation of reality, while analysing war photography.

[17] Poe (1809-1849) is considered the father of the literary gothic, Clarke Henderson's (1887-1958) work forms a sample of post-WWI hard-boiled fiction and Burroughs (1914-1997) is one of the most representative writers of the Beat Generation. These American authors' works cover, together with Nabokov's, a period beginning in the nineteenth and ending towards the end of the twentieth century, and they present adolescent and pre-adolescent girls in sexual relationships with much older men or sexually violated youth in the family domain and beyond (see Michael "The Other" 2018).

[18] For example, Danielle Egan and Gail L. Hawkes (2008) criticize the APA Task Force Report, further discussing other bibliography on the discourse of sexualisation.

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